

It's Time to Spring into

Many teachers have implored, "Don't give me theory; give me something practical." When I expressed this sentiment to professional development consultant Beverly Showers, she replied (quoting Lewin 1951, 169): "There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

Recent trends in education, such as professional development schools, data-driven decision making, and undergraduate research, have focused attention on school-based research. University and school *teachers*, not only



At that moment, my perspective about the relationship between classrooms and things theoretical changed. In an "aha" instant, I realized that every decision I made and every action I took in a classroom was based on a set of tenets that explained the world of school. I had a theory! It was an underdeveloped and untested theory, to be sure, but it was a theory.

In subsequent years, I learned that testing theories is a good thing. We learn what works and what does not work; we clarify beliefs and refine actions. I also learned that action research is a practical way to test educational theories—or things grounded in theory—such as ideas, strategies, and materials. Action research is a systematic approach used by practitioners to conceive questions and control methodologies, and to explore classroom or school-based problems. Action research is the perfect marriage of theory and practice.

hard-core researchers, should engage in this work. Teachers are in a perfect position to answer pressing questions in areas such as curriculum, teaching and learning, achievement, and No Child Left Behind. Of course, the ideal scenario occurs when teachers and traditional researchers are able to work together to find answers to such questions.

University faculty members and classroom teachers often take adversarial positions relative to research. Faculty

Action RESEARCH!

by Joyce Lynn Garrett
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members frequently perceive teachers to be inadequately prepared to conduct research or to analyze and apply research findings. Conversely, teachers believe that faculty members are "ivory tower thinkers" who do

not do well is make the results of their research readily available and appealing to school practitioners. What neither group does well is join forces to conduct and report meaningful research.

your students and make you a better teacher, whether you teach six-year-olds, 16-year-olds, or 26-year-olds.

Reference

Lewin, K. 1951. *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*, ed. D. Cartwright. New York: Harper & Row.



not understand the practical realities of a classroom. Of course, neither perception is correct. Teachers collect, collate, and analyze data every day. What they do not do well is share the results with others. In most cases, university faculty members are former elementary or secondary teachers who have traded one classroom for another; they understand all too well the rigors of frontline teaching. What they do

Collaborating on action research projects, classroom teachers and university faculty can develop formidable teams. The promise of what they offer the profession is significant. Though more common today than five years ago, collaborative research efforts still fall short. I hope each of you will identify an important question and explore it with a school or university colleague. Doing so will serve the interests of



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